

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN - PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper on Early Childhood Education (ECE)- a goal of Education For All (EFA), assesses the progress of Pakistan's efforts and strategies mainly during post Dakar period 2001-02 to 2005-06 and the major challenges being encountered. The information includes analysis of National Educational Data on ECE in the light of policies and plans, EFA projections along with the contribution of civil society, private sector and non-profit organizations. National data reflect that Pakistan has made progress in education sector over all and in ECE, keeping in view EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in response to the World Education Forum resolutions (1990) and Dakar (2000) resolutions. ECE is encountering multiple challenges which need to be addressed to achieve outcomes during the next phases of the National Plan of Action (NPA) for EFA - 2001-2015.*

*Key Words: Pre-school Education, Early Childhood Education, Education For All, ECE in Pakistan.*

## INTRODUCTION

It is universally UNESCO, lead agency for United Nation Decade for Education (2005-14) advocates that Early Childhood Education (ECE) is about laying sound intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundations. It helps to foster habits, values, attitudes and skills that are instrumental in amicably negotiating with the demands of the primary education. ECE contributes towards the habit formation and enhances the active learning capacity of a child. ECE also aims at educating young children "preventing further degradation of our planet and contribution to sustainable society where values of human rights, peace and justice are up held" (UNESCO, 2008). It is thus crucial to pay attention to the early years of a child's life just before the entry into primary school. According to neuroscientists first five years of a child are very significant in habit formation. This provides the base for development of competence and coping skills, which produces ever lasting affects on learning, behavior and health throughout the life. The young ones of every animal love to play. It is their way of learning. When children play they learn a multiplicity of concepts, skills, understanding and attitudes simultaneously (Lindberg & Swedlow, 1980). The young

child is more flexible and can be fitted to any mold. This stage helps to lay foundations of basic cognitive, social, emotional and personality traits (Shami, 2005).

The children of ECE fall in Piaget's Preoperational Stage (2-7 years) which has been further divided into two sub-stages - Pre-conceptual Period (2-4 years) and Intuitive Period (4-7 years). Pre-conceptual period is characterized by the appearance of primitive ideas, concepts and method of reasoning. At this stage child develops ability to make one word or symbol to represent one thing. Child lacks ability to think about an object in two different ways at the same time. When two events occur together child thinks that one cause the other. They are egocentric i.e. viewing world from one's own perspective while not recognizing that others may have different point of view. Egocentrism is graded as intellectual shortcoming. They are unable to keep true properties of an object in mind. In intuitive period children are less egocentric but concentrate on one aspect of the situation only. They develop ability to classify things on the basis of shape, color and size. They are unable to recognize that certain properties of objects like volume, mass and number remain unchanged when appearance of the object is altered (Shaffer, 1999).

It is imperative to consider the characteristics of ECE children while planning ECE programs and prepare the children for life to follow. ECE is visualized as more than a preparatory stage for formal schooling. Now ECE is also viewed in a broader context of social development, gender equity and poverty reduction and focus on holistic development through comprehensive and integrated ECE.

The preschool education contributes towards the time-bound development of child. The young child is more flexible in the earlier years. It helps them to lay foundations of child's basic cognitive, social, emotional, physical and personality structures. It is usually said that once these psychological structure are shaped, it becomes difficult to change them, later. The early childhood is a developmental period that extends from the end of infancy to about five years. A child of 3+ years is usually considered suitable for preschool education. The major objectives of ECE remain as holistic development of child, enhancement of potential to learn, awareness of cultural values and norms and preparation for formal schooling.

Pakistan is a member of EFA movement and is committed to promote Early Childhood Education program in the country with particular emphasis on girl's education. The ECE program in Pakistan intends to focus on holistic pre-primary education for children and its linkages with primary education. The distinct aim of the draft remain to promote ECE within the context of EFA along with quality of education and management.

Jomtein Declaration on Education for All (1990) was a major initiative to promote ECE in member countries. The resolution recognizes learning begins at birth and thus can be realized. The policies of ECE derive guidelines from this resolution as an essential component of the basic education. However the targets set in Conference could not be achieved by the members. After a decade the Dakar Framework of Action 2000 came into light that again signified the importance of ECE that also advocates to expand the provision and to improve the quality of ECE for all children.

The population of Pakistan is estimated to be over 159 million comprising 52% males and 48% females of which 64% are rural dwellers, which is expected to increase to 181 millions by 2015. The life expectancy has improved to 64 years for males and 66 years for females and birth rate has decreased from 2.2 (2000) to 1.9 (2005) due to extension of social services and awareness. During the last mid decade (2001-02 to 2005-06) social sector has experienced remarkable increase in financial allocations particularly in education and health. Now (2006-07) Pakistan has 252,125 institutions of all categories having enrolment of 36.831 million and 1.345 million teachers in the education system. There is a three fold increase in the budget for education from Rs.75 billion (2001-02) to Rs.254 billions (2006-07) (Ministry of Education, 2008). HDI of Pakistan is 138 which reflect grey areas.

Pakistan in its constitution recognizes that education is the basic right of every citizen and access to education for every individual is vital for socio-economic development of the country. National policies and plans have been developed to provide education to all citizens as well as to honor the international commitments. EFA Perspective Development Plan (PDP) has been developed. Education Sector Reforms (ESR) has been initiated to meet the deficiency of national education policy- 1998-2010 in this regard and ECE has been declared as one of its major thrust areas. National Plan of Action (NPA)- 2001-2015 on EFA is in place to provide guidelines for the development of ECE in phases to achieve set goals and targets.

A year before grade one is called Katchi class. In early days of Pakistan Kachi classes were a common feature in public sector primary schools. In seventies this practice was almost discontinued. Recognizing the importance of early childhood education for young children provision was made in the National Education Policy (1998-2010) to reintroduce Katchi as a pre-primary class in primary schools of public sector, extending the primary education to six years. However, in private sector schools pre-primary education is well organized from the very beginning. Almost all such schools have provision of ECE in the form of Pre-nursery, Nursery, Kindergarten KG-I and KG-II.

Early Childhood Education gained momentum in Pakistan

during the post Dakar period, ECE offers programs in both public and private sectors and all aim at physical, emotional, intellectual and social development of children (3-4 years old) and to facilitate their entrance in primary schools. Subsequently Pakistan initiated a number of actions to realize EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as under:

- Education Advisory Board particularly for EFA Policy and Planning constituted,
- EFA Unit established,
- National EFA committees formulated,
- Political commitment for EFA at the highest level, i.e. Cabinet, the President of Pakistan and Chief Executive mobilized,
- Resource Mobilization Campaign for EFA at provincial, national and international levels,
- Education Sector Reforms Focus on EFA goals, sector wide approaches and poverty linkage,
- Preparation of framework of EFA plan involving all concerned - UN agencies, donor agencies, NGOs, private sector, media, government departments and ministries,
- Focal points for EFA in the provinces and federating units for supervision,
- ToRs of National EFA forum formulated for representative/member organizations and agencies,
- EFA plan prepared in collaboration with the provincial partners,
- Provincial EFA forums and technical groups constituted,
- Framework of National Plan of Action (NPA) in terms of population and enrolment projections, annual targets in adult literacy and primary participation rate and program/inputs to achieve these targets for next 15 years prepared,
- Provincial EFA plans for all the four provinces, FATA, FANA, ICT and AJK prepared.

Public sector is attempting to persuade, organize and facilitate private sector and communities to open and run

ECE institutions. UN agencies, development partners and Federal and Provincial Education Foundations are providing support in this regard. In this context, the Teachers Resource Center (TRC), which supported to develop the national ECE curriculum, is providing support especially in teacher training and classroom material development.

## Methodology

The first goal of Dakar Framework of Action (2000) for EFA is "Expanding and improving comprehensive Early Childhood Education (ECE) especially for the most vulnerable disadvantaged children" for which following major Indicators have been highlighted:

- **Indicator 1:** Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Early Childhood Education (ECE)
- **Indicator 2:** Percentage of New Entrants to Primary Grade I with ECE
- **Indicator 3:** Private Sector Enrolment as Percentage of Total Enrolment in ECE
- **Indicator 4:** Percentages of Trained Teachers in ECE

National Plan of Action (NPA) on EFA- 2001-2015 (Ministry of Education, 2003) as per Dakar Convention resolution set the following targets for expansion and improvement of Early Childhood Education:

### NPA Targets: 2015

Total :	50%
Male :	50%
Female:	50%

### Mid term targets: 2005-06

Total :	32%
Male :	36%
Female:	28%

(Source: Nation Plan of Action of Ministry of Education, 2003)

The assessment of the progress of Pakistan towards ECE is based on the comparison of education data for the academic year 2001-02 with the academic school year 2005-06 as reported in reports of National Education Census- 2006 undertaken by Ministry of Education and Pakistan Education Statistics-2006-2007.

## Analysis & Discussion

### *Scheme of Studies and Curriculum for ECE*

A national curriculum of ECE has been formulated in collaboration with private sector and has been implemented in all over the country. However, provision of ECE varies among provinces. Earlier, it was the major domain of private sector only but now draft national education policy advocates its initiation in all public schools of the country.

ECE has been formalized for all public schools and the children of 4/5 years age group shall be admitted. Components of curriculum have been divided into three blocks as under:

- Language experience block (native language/Urdu/English)
- Heritage block and
- Environment block, which will be taught through interactive methods in small group activities (Ministry of Education, 2007)

### *Indicator 1: Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) in ECE*

In 2000-01 the estimated total population was 139 million and the cohort size of age 3-5 years relevant to ECE program was 8.1 million (6 percent). In 2005-06, this cohort decreased to 7.8 million (Male = 4.1 million and Female = 3.7 million), of the total population (154 million) and thus shrunk with respect to the total population.

The gross enrolment ratio (GER) is the ratio of all children enrolled at ECE level to the population of the children in the age range 3 plus and below 5 years. However data includes both younger and older children ranging from two and a half years to six years.

Table 1 shows that Participation in ECE/pre-primary education has increased from 2.9 million (2001-02) to 7.1 million in 2005-06. In terms of gross enrolment ratio (GER) it

Gender	Gross Enrolment (2001-02)	Gross Enrolment (2003-04)	Percentage increase over (2001-02)	Gross Enrolment (2005-06)	Percentage increase over (2001-02)
Total	2,969,025	3,573,921	20	7,135,446	140
Male	1,673,089	2,000,538	19	3,949,480	136
Female	1,295,936	1,573,391	21	3,185,966	146

Table 1. Progress in ECE (2001-02 to 2005-06)

Source: Ministry of Education, 2003, 2005 & 2007

has increased from 36% (2001-02) to 91% (2005-06) indicating 55 percentage point enhancement. This increase in GER is the notable impact of the efforts. The total gross-enrolment of 2005-06 indicates an increase of 140% over the year 2001-02. In case of females it is 146%, which is very encouraging progress.

These achievements appears to be on high side and inflated due to the reason that on one hand earlier years do not include data of private sector and on the other, the age range of enrolled children is from 21/2 years to 6 years where as the percentage computed is from the cohort ranging from 3 to 5 years.

Table 2 shows the overall gross participation of children in ECE in 2001-02 was 17% in urban areas and 45% in rural areas. The female participation was 18% in urban areas and 40% in rural areas. In 2005-06, the gross participation of children in ECE improved to 88% in urban areas against 93% in rural areas. The female participation almost became similar- 86% in urban areas and 85% in rural areas.

Table 3 reflects 3-5 age group population, gross enrolment and left outs. There is a decreasing trend among the left out children. In 2001-02 there were 5.2 million children who could not be enrolled in ECE primary education whereas in 2003-04 the number reduced to 4.5 million which has now further reduced to only 0.7 million. Figures appear to be somewhat inflated but still

Year/Location	Total	Urban	Rural
2001-02	36	17	45
Total	33	18	40
Female			
200-3-04	44	19	57
Total	40	20	50
Female			
2005-06	91	88	93
Total	85	86	85
Female			

Table 2. Comparisons of GER between Urban and Rural Areas (%)

Year	Population (3-5)	Gross Enrolment	Left outs	% age
2001-02	8,190,386	2,969,025 *	5,221,361	64
2003-04	8,078,639	3,573,928 *	4,499,711	
2005-06	7,809,445	7,135,446	673,999	9

Table 3: Total ECE Population and Gross Enrolment



there is a decrease in the left outs as per commitment with EFA.

Table 4 shows the data do reflect some achievement as ECE enrolment has increased. The National Plan of Action for EFA set moderate targets for the year 2001-02 as 26% whereas the actual achievement was about 36%. The target of GER in 2003-04 was 29% whereas achievement was observed as 44%. In case of female children the same pattern was observed in ECE. According to NPA the target of GER for the year 2005-06 was 32% and for female it was 28%, and the overall achievement reported was about 91% and for female 85%, which again show increase mainly due to inclusion of private sector enrolment besides the government interventions. It clearly reflects the achievement of Pakistan is beyond the mid decade targets.

### Gender Parity in ECE

Gender disparity in ECE enrolment as measured by Gender Parity Index (GPI) has been less pronounced because it is continuously narrowing down. GPI has increased from 0.83 (2001-02) to 0.88 (2005-06) however it still remains in favor of males.

### Indicator 2: Percentage of new entrants in Grade I (Primary level) with ECE.

With the expansion of ECE enrolment percentage of new entrants into grade 1 at primary level having some form of ECE has been continuously increasing (Table 5). In the

NPA Targets (%)		Actual achievement (%)		
Year	Total	Female	Total	Female
2001-02	26	20	36	33
2003-04	29	24	44	40
2005-06	32	28	91	85

Source: Ministry of Education, Pakistan Education Statistics-2001-2002, 2003-2004 & 2005-2006

**Table 4. Comparison of set targets and Achievements (2001-02 to 2005-06)**

Pakistan	Percentage of New Entrant in ECE program		
	Male	Female	Total
2001-02	58	72	64
2003-04	54	66	59
2005-06	72	78	74

Source: Pakistan Education Statistics 2001-02 to 2005-06, Ministry of Education, Islamabad

**Table 5: New Entrants in grade I having ECE**

post Dakar period there is 10 percentage points increase of new entrants having ECE from 64% (2001-02) to 74% (2005-06).

In 2001-02, the percentage of new entrants with ECE was 56% in urban areas and 65 in rural areas. The female participation remained same in both areas as 72%. In 2005-06 the percentage of new entrants with ECE was 63 in urban areas and relatively higher in rural i.e.77. Noticeably the trend indicates that participation of new female entrants with ECE was higher in rural areas (79%) as compared to urban areas (72%)(Table 6).

### Indicator 3: Share of Private Sector Enrolment in ECE

Out of total ECE enrolment (7.1 million in 2005-06) 2.7 millions were studying in private sector schools of which 1.5 millions were male and 1.2 million were female.

The private sector is contributing about 33% in the education system overall, whereas at ECE level, its share is about 39% by 2005-06. Further the proportion of these children under ECE program was remarkably higher in urban areas i.e. 73% as compared to 22% of rural areas, and female involvement was also better in urban (71%) than in rural areas (22%). It appears urban parents have higher tendency to enroll children in private schools under ECE program as compared to rural parents.

### Indicator 4: ECE Percentage of Trained Teachers

In public sector the data of trained teachers was not

Year/Location	Total	Urban	Rural
2001-02	64	56	65
Total	72	73	72
Female			
2003-04	59	53	60
Total	65	66	65
Female			
2005-06	74	63	77
Total	78	72	79
Female			

**Table 6. Urban and Rural Comparisons of New Entrants with ECE in Grade I (%)**

	2003-06	2006-11	2011-16	Total
Development	1,876	3,695	4,496	10,067
Recurring	1,962	11,163	25,138	38,262
Total	3,838	14,858	29,633	48,329

Source: UNESCO, 2003

**Table 7. Cost Estimates of ECE in Pakistan (in millions)**

available. The reason is that no specific teacher is inducted in ECE program. However, in the private sector 47 percent teachers were trained of which 36 percent were males and 49 percent were female.

In 2005-06 trained teachers in ECE program were 47%, of which 10% were working in urban and 22% in rural areas and even among them the proportion of female trained teachers is reported higher. This issue of trained teachers at ECE is being addressed by the appointment of qualified teachers in public sector.

### Financing

These estimates include share of development partners and UN Agencies. Pakistan planned and implemented Education Sector Reforms on their assurance but unfortunately the assistance have not been received as committed which affected the phased program. This is against the Dakar resolution as well where developed countries were supposed to assist the developing countries.

### Conclusion

The ECE program is facing following major issues and challenges:

- Clarity of EFA concept
- Provision of ECE facility for all children
- Recognition of preprimary stage at par with primary and secondary
- Introduction of ECE in all primary and middle schools
- Elimination of gender parity
- Formulation of learning standards for ECE
- Provision of trained teachers and classrooms in public sector
- Capacity building of managers at the provincial, district and school levels to plan, implement and monitor preschool education programs
- Support of research on ECE issues
- Collection of age wise data of ECE children
- Encouragement of private sector and NGOs to

participate in ECE

- Formal infrastructure for supervision
- Mechanism for funding
- Separate cadre for ECE teachers
- Standardization of facilities and ensuring their provision
- Setting of realistic targets as per EFA

Keeping in view the major issues and challenges to ECE the Draft National Education Policy, 2008 has proposed following actions:

- Improvements in quality of ECE shall be based on a concept of holistic development of the child that provides a stimulating, interactive environment, including play, rather than focus on regimes that require rote learning rigid achievement standards.
- The ECE age group shall be recognized as comprising 3 to 5 years. At least one year pre-primary education shall be provided by the state and universal access to ECE shall be ensured within the next ten years.
- Provision of ECE shall be attached to primary schools, and these schools shall be provided with additional budget, teachers and assistance for this purpose.
- For ECE teachers, a two-year specialized training in dealing with young children shall be a necessary requirement.
- This training shall be on the basis of ECE revised national curriculum. The curriculum and support material for ECE shall take account of the cultural diversity of particular areas. (National Education Policy (draft), 2008)

It appears premature to comment on these actions. However there are lessons to be learnt from previous education policies particularly in implementation. Let's hope the question on UNESCO report on EFA- 2008 "WILL WE ACHIEVE?" is defied.

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